GREAT RHUBARB RECIPES

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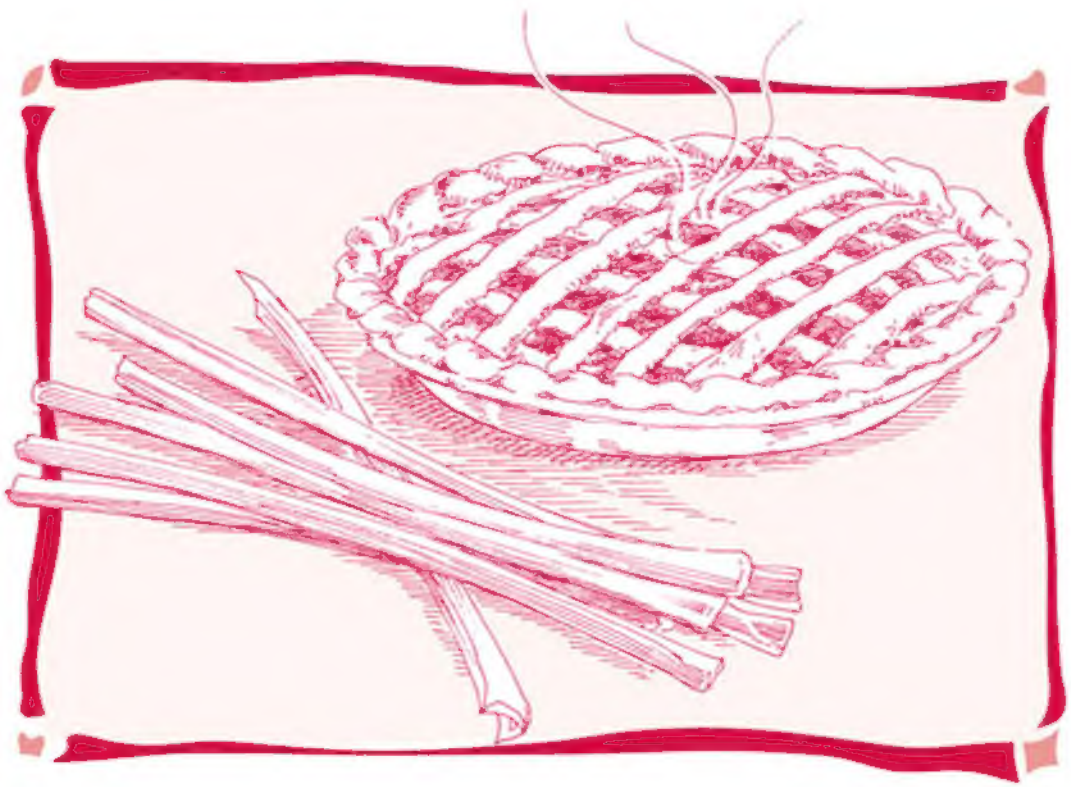

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A Storey Country Wisdom Bulletin

Great Rhubarb Recipes

Nancy C. Ralston & Mar ynor Jordan

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Introduction

Good, old-fashioned rhubarb has been around for a very long time. Thought by many to be a fruit, rhubarb actually is a perennial vegetable. When sweetened, its bitter stalks mix well with many fruits, especially strawberries, which conveniently ripen at the same time. The sturdy perennial plants are very easy to grow. Once established in the garden, rhubarb will faithfully push its way through the soil regardless of the weather. As one country humorist put it long ago, "Nothing retards rhubarb; it could get out of a straitjacket."

Cultivated for medicinal purposes, rhubarb was grown in China for several centuries before it was introduced in the Western world late in the sixteenth century. However, not until 300 years later did its edible qualities truly become appreciated. At that time, rhubarb was known as *pieplant.* Its colorful stalks were carefully gathered each spring to be used for cobblers and pies throughout the early growing season. As the recipes in this bulletin reflect, however, rhubarb no longer is grown just for pie. There are many other ways to prepare and enjoy this vegetable.

"Do not eat the leaves" is the rhubarb watchword. The leaves of this plant contain oxalic acid and can be toxic. Be sure to use only the stalks in recipes.

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Growing Your Own Rhubarb

Growing rhubarb is easy, even for people who have no green thumb. It requires very little care — weeding and a feeding every fall — and deserves to be in every garden.

Rhubarb likes rich, slightly acid, fertile soil with lots of organic matter. Purchase either root divisions or container-grown plants. Select a site in sun or light shade, and plant in early spring, a few weeks before the last frost. Plant divisions 18 to 24 inches apart with the buds about 2 inches below the soil surface.

Water well after planting and keep the soil moist throughout the growing season. Snip off any flower shoots as they appear. Once established, rhubarb plants grow rapidly and often become crowded within 5 to 10 years. To rejuvenate the plants, divide them in fall by slicing the crown with a sharp shovel. Dig up and remove one portion of the plant, fill the hole with soil, and replant crown sections.

Generally you may harvest a small crop of rhubarb after the first year — although if you can resist this temptation, the plants will be hardier the following year. It's best to wait until the third year to harvest all you want. Rhubarb is most flavorful in cool spring.

The varieties Valentine and Strawberry have an especially vivid red color, while Cherry Giant likes warmer weather more than most other rhubarbs.

Harvest by grasping the stem near the base and pulling up; give the stem a twist as you pull. You can also cut the stem from the plant with a sharp knife.

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Choosing & Using Rhubarb

Choose stalks that are firm and crisp, without blemishes. The leaves should look fresh and be blemish-free as well.

Rhubarb wilts rapidly and will stay fresh in the refrigerator for up to 3 days; wrap it tightly in a plastic bag.

If the leaves are still on, wash and remove them just before using the stalks. Trim off the leaf ends and lower ends of the stalks; wash the stalks. Some fibrous stems may need to be pared; you can also pull off the strings as for celery.

To freeze rhubarb, wash and cut into small pieces. Remove tough stalks. Blanch for 1½ minutes in steam or boiling water and pack into freezer containers or plastic bags. You may also freeze it in syrup without blanching it. A simple sugar syrup for freezing may be made by mixing one part sugar with two parts water, bringing the mixture to a boil to dissolve the sugar, then refrigerating the mixture until chilled. Add ⅓ to ½ cup of cold sugar syrup to a 2-cup container packed with clean rhubarb, allowing ½ inch of headspace. Mix gently, label, and freeze.

Use Nonreactive Pans

When cooking rhubarb, you should always use nonreactive pans, such as anodized aluminum, stainless steel, Teflon-coated aluminum, or enamel-coated cast iron cookware.

Rhubarb cooked in reactive metal pots (aluminum, iron, and copper) will turn an unappetizing brown color.

Rhubarb is sometimes eaten raw, with a little sugar or salt, but most often it's cooked in one of the ways described in this booklet.

Cut into ¾-inch pieces, rhubarb cooks, in a small quantity of water over moderate heat, in about 10 minutes. It is done when the fibers become soft.

Rhubarb Math

1 pound rhubarb equals 4 to 8 stalks
1 pound rhubarb yields 4 cups sliced
1 pound rhubarb yields 2 cups chopped and cooked

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Rhubarb at Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Because it's technically a vegetable but most often treated as a fruit, rhubarb is versatile enough to be used at any meal.

Rhubarb Nut Bread

Serve this bread warm with butter for breakfast, then enjoy the leftovers with your afternoon tea.

Topping

½ cup brown sugar

½ cup chopped nuts

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon butter

Batter

2½ cups flour

1½ cups brown sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1½ cups fresh or frozen diced rhubarb

1 cup buttermilk

⅔ cup cooking oil

1 egg

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease two 9- by 5-inch loaf pans.
2. To make the topping, mix the brown sugar, nuts, and cinnamon. Blend the butter in with your fingers until well mixed. Refrigerate.
3. In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, baking soda, and salt. Stir in the rhubarb.

4. Add the buttermilk, oil, egg, and vanilla. Stir until just combined. Divide the batter evenly between the prepared pans.
5. Sprinkle half of the topping mixture evenly over each loaf.
6. Bake for 45 to 60 minutes or until a tester inserted near the center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes on a wire rack; turn loaves upside down on the rack to cool further before removing pans.

MAKES 2 LOAVES

Rhubarb-Orange Sauce

This recipe is at home on pound cake or ice cream, but we enjoy it most as an alternative to maple syrup on our pancakes and waffles.

4 cups chopped (½-inch pieces) rhubarb

1 cup sugar

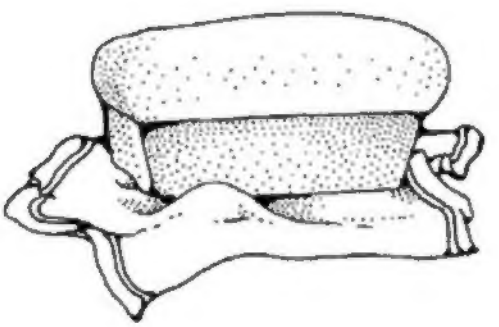
¼ cup orange juice

¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Combine all ingredients in a microwave-safe dish.

2. Cover and microwave on high for 8 minutes, until the rhubarb is tender. Stir twice during cooking.

SERVES 4



Rhubarb Fritters

Dipped in pure maple syrup, these treats tame rhubarb's tartness.

Oil for frying

1 cup flour

⅔ cup milk

2 eggs, separated

1 tablespoon butter, melted

1 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar

2 cups chopped rhubarb

Pure maple syrup or confectioners' sugar (optional), for serving

1. Heat oil 2 to 3 inches deep in a large skillet or saucepan to 375°F on a deep-fat thermometer.

2. In a medium-sized mixing bowl, blend well the flour, milk, egg yolks, butter, and 1 tablespoon of the sugar.

3. Beat the egg whites in a small bowl until they form soft peaks. Fold them into the flour mixture.

4. In a medium-sized bowl, coat the rhubarb pieces in the remaining 1 cup of sugar, then fold the pieces into the batter.

5. Drop fritters by tablespoonsful into the oil and cook, turning once, until golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Do not crowd the pan. Remove fritters with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.

6. Serve immediately, with maple syrup for dipping or confectioners' sugar for dusting, if desired.

SERVES 8

Baked Rhubarb

Serve this side dish with roast herbed chicken or pork.

4 cups unpeeled, diced rhubarb

1½ cups sugar

1 orange, sliced but not peeled

2 sticks cinnamon

6 whole cloves

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and butter an 8-inch square baking dish.

2. Spread 2 cups of rhubarb in the dish, then sprinkle with ¾ cup of the sugar, half of the orange slices, 1 stick cinnamon, and 3 cloves.

3. Repeat the layering with the remaining rhubarb, sugar, orange slices, cinnamon stick, and cloves.

4. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the rhubarb is tender when pierced with a fork. Discard cloves and cinnamon sticks before serving.

SERVES 6

Stewed Rhubarb

Versatile stewed rhubarb may be used as a side dish or dessert. Best of all, it will keep, refrigerated, for up to five days.

2 pounds fresh rhubarb, cut into 2-inch lengths (to make 8 cups)

1 cup sugar

2 to 3 tablespoons water

1. Combine the rhubarb, sugar, and water in a saucepan.

2. Cover and cook over low heat, stirring frequently to prevent sticking and scorching, for 7 to 10 minutes, or until the rhubarb is tender.

SERVES 6

Scalloped Rhubarb

We enjoy this as a welcome change from scalloped potatoes.

½ cup (1 stick) butter

1 cup bread cubes made from stale bread

3 cups chopped rhubarb, fresh or frozen

¾ cup sugar

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F.

2. Melt the butter in a 1½-quart shallow baking dish; stir in the bread cubes, then the rhubarb and sugar. Mix gently until well combined.

3. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the rhubarb is tender.

SERVES 6 TO 8

Rosy Soup

Top this soup with a dollop of crème fraîche and a sprig of fresh mint and it will be pretty as a picture as well as delicious.

1½ cups chopped red rhubarb
1½ cups fresh hulled strawberries
¾ cup sugar
1 three-inch cinnamon stick
⅓ cup club soda
⅓ cup red wine
½ cup crème fraîche, for garnish
6 sprigs fresh mint, for garnish

1. In a large saucepan, combine the rhubarb, strawberries, sugar, and cinnamon stick; add water to cover. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes or until the rhubarb is tender.

2. Remove from the heat and press the mixture through a sieve into a mixing bowl. Add the club soda and wine.

3. Refrigerate 4 hours or up to overnight. Garnish with crème fraîche and mint.

SERVES 6

Rhubarb-Cranberry Soup

Serve this soup in clear glass mugs or bowls so the beautiful color shows.

1 cup cranberry juice
⅓ cup sugar

2 cinnamon sticks

1½ teaspoons cornstarch

⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 cups chopped rhubarb

1. Combine ½ cup of the cranberry juice and the sugar, cinnamon sticks, cornstarch, and nutmeg in a medium-sized saucepan.

2. Cook, stirring, over low heat until the mixture thickens. Add the rhubarb and cook for 10 minutes longer or until the rhubarb is tender.

3. Transfer the mixture to a bowl, then stir in the remaining ½ cup cranberry juice. Refrigerate 4 hours or up to overnight.

4. Remove the cinnamon and serve.

SERVES 4

Chicken with Rhubarb Sauce

In a spring when the garden floods you with rhubarb, this recipe will come in handy. It proves that experimenting with foods, like rhubarb, that most people think belong in a pie can pay off in a tasty surprise.

1½ cups chopped (½-inch pieces) rhubarb

1 cup orange juice

¼ cup honey

¼ cup lemon juice

2 tablespoons sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon arrowroot or potato flour

3 tablespoons cold water

1 broiler-fryer (about 3 pounds), cut into 8 pieces

2 tablespoons vegetable oil or butter

1. Cook the rhubarb in the orange juice in a medium-sized saucepan over medium heat until it's very soft, about 10 minutes. Strain the mixture through a sieve; discard the solids.

2. In the saucepan, cook the rhubarb purée with the honey, lemon juice, sugar, and salt until the sugar and honey are dissolved. Remove the sauce from the heat. Measure and set aside ¼ cup of sauce.

3. Dissolve the arrowroot in the water and stir it into the remaining mixture in the saucepan. Stir over low heat until the sauce is thick and glossy; remove from heat and set aside.

4. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

5. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, brown the chicken pieces in the oil and remove them to a large casserole dish. Pour the sauce over the chicken. Bake for 40 minutes.

6. Stir the reserved ¼ cup sauce into the casserole dish and serve.

SERVES 6 TO 8

Rhubarb "Reunion" Salad

Gelatin salads are a staple at many family reunions, including ours. It's always fun to tell relatives who admire the flavor of this salad that they've just enjoyed rhubarb.

1 package (about 6 ounces) strawberry-flavored gelatin

1½ cups boiling water

1½ cups cold water

2 cups chopped (1-inch pieces) fresh rhubarb

2 cups sliced fresh strawberries

1 can (13 ounces) pineapple chunks, undrained

1. Stir the gelatin in the boiling water in a large bowl until completely dissolved, at least 2 minutes. Stir in the cold water. Refrigerate until thickened, about 1 to 1½ hours.

2. Meanwhile, cook the rhubarb over medium heat in a small saucepan with a few tablespoons of water for 10 minutes, or until tender. Drain the rhubarb, chop it, and set aside to cool completely.

3. Lightly oil, or spray with cooking oil, an 8-cup gelatin mold.

4. Add the rhubarb, strawberries, and pineapple to the gelatin mixture; stir until combined. Pour into the prepared mold and chill until completely firm, about 4 hours.

SERVES 8 TO 10

Rhubarb Punch

Refreshing and easy to vary, just use your creativity. How about replacing some of the water with orange or cranberry juice or lemonade?

4 cups chopped rhubarb

4 cups water

¾ to 1 cup sugar

Sliced lemons

1. Cook the rhubarb and water in a large saucepan over medium heat for 10 minutes, or until the rhubarb is tender. Let cool.

2. Strain the mixture through a fine-meshed sieve or cheesecloth; discard the pulp.

3. Add sugar to taste; serve over ice with floating lemon slices.

SERVES 6 TO 8

Rhubarb-Raisin Relish

We enjoy this relish alongside grilled meats and fish, but it also makes a tasty change from traditional cucumber relish on grilled hot dogs

and hamburgers.

1 cup brown sugar

1 cup cider vinegar

1 cup water

1 stick cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground allspice

½ teaspoon ground cloves

½ teaspoon mustard seed

¼ teaspoon celery seed

1½ cups sliced fresh or thawed rhubarb

1 cup chopped onion

1 cup seedless raisins

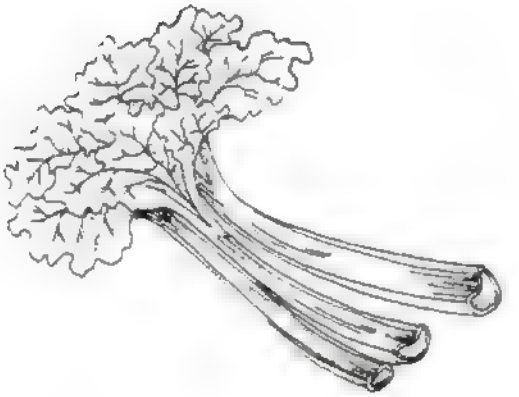
1. Combine the brown sugar, vinegar, water, cinnamon, allspice, cloves, mustard seed, and celery seed in a large saucepan and boil for 2 minutes.

2. Add the rhubarb and onion. Reduce the heat, cover the pan, and cook the mixture slowly for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3. Rinse and drain the raisins. Stir them into the rhubarb mixture and cook, uncovered, for 10 minutes longer.

4. Transfer the mixture to a bowl or pint jars and refrigerate overnight or for up to 2 weeks.

2 PINTS



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Cakes & Desserts

Rhubarb may be best known in a pie, but it makes delicious cakes and other desserts, too. These recipes are sure to draw praise from anyone with a sweet tooth.

Rhubarb Angel Food Cake

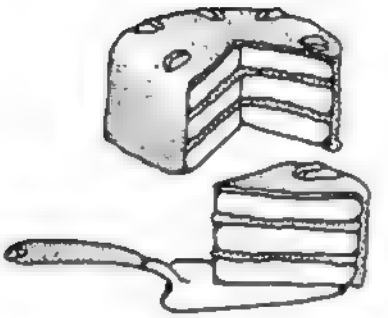
When it's just too hot to turn on the oven, this recipe comes in handy. All you have to do is buy a prepared angel food cake and doctor it up to make it a "homemade" dessert.

2 cups chopped rhubarb
1½ cups sugar
4 tablespoons butter
4 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca
½ cup water
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon lemon juice
1 prepared 10-inch angel food cake

1. In a large saucepan, combine the rhubarb, sugar, butter, tapioca, water, salt, and lemon juice. Cook over low heat for 10 minutes; the mixture will be like a thick sauce. Cool completely.

2. Cut the cake horizontally into four layers. Put the bottom layer on a serving platter and spread with one-fourth of the rhubarb mixture; repeat with remaining layers, ending with rhubarb on top of the cake. If there is any sauce remaining, pour it into the cake's center cavity.

SERVES 8 TO 10



Simple Sour Cream Cake

We call this cake a "simple" favorite because we don't have to frost it — we even serve it still warm from the oven!

Topping

1 cup chopped nuts

½ cup granulated sugar

1 teaspoon cinnamon

Cake

1½ cups firmly packed brown sugar

4 tablespoons butter, at room temperature

2 eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 cups flour

½ cup wheat germ (or omit and increase flour by ⅓ cup)

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

4 cups chopped (½-inch pieces) rhubarb

1 cup sour cream

Whipped cream (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 9- by 13-inch baking pan.

2. Combine the nuts, granulated sugar, and cinnamon in a small bowl for the topping; set aside.

3. To make the cake, beat together the brown sugar and butter in a large bowl until well combined. Beat in the eggs and vanilla.

4. In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, wheat germ, baking soda, and salt. Stir the flour mixture into the sugar mixture.

5. Stir in the rhubarb and sour cream until well blended. The batter will be thick.

6. Spread the batter in the prepared pan, then sprinkle the reserved topping evenly over the cake.

7. Bake for 40 minutes, or until a tester inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean.

8. Serve with whipped cream, if desired.

SERVES 10

Surprise Upside-Down Cake

This cake comes together quickly and is an interesting change from the more common pineapple upside-down cake.

2 tablespoons butter

1 cup brown sugar

2 cups diced fresh rhubarb

1 cup sugar

¼ cup vegetable oil

1 egg

2 cups sifted flour

2½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup milk

Cream or whipped cream (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Melt the butter in a 9- by 13-inch baking pan. Sprinkle the brown sugar and then the rhubarb evenly over the butter.

2. To make the batter, combine the sugar and oil in a large bowl. Beat in the egg.

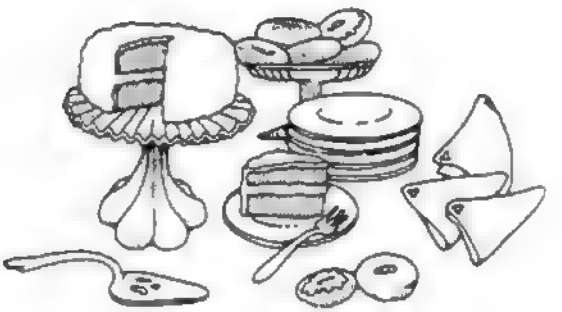
3. In a medium-sized bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt.

4. Stir the flour mixture into the sugar mixture alternately with the milk, adding about one-third of the flour or milk at a time.

5. Pour the batter over the rhubarb. Bake the cake for 40 to 45 minutes. Cool on a wire rack.

6. Carefully turn the cake onto a serving platter. Serve with cream, if desired.

SERVES 6



Rhubarb Shortcake

It's simplicity itself to whip up these shortcakes and a rhubarb Simple Sauce. Some might say including a few sliced strawberries is gilding the lily, but others prefer that classic strawberry-rhubarb combination.

2 cups flour

3 teaspoons baking powder

1 tablespoon sugar

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup vegetable shortening

¾ cup milk

Simple Sauce (see recipe below)

1. Preheat oven to 425°F and butter a 9-inch cake pan.

2. Sift the flour. Combine it with the baking powder, sugar, and salt, and sift again, into a large bowl. Blend in the shortening until the mixture is crumbly.

3. Add the milk and mix well.

4. Turn the dough into the prepared pan; with the palm of your hand, push the dough higher on sides than in the center.

5. Bake for 25 minutes, or until the cake is golden brown. Turn cake onto rack to cool.

6. To serve, split the cake into two equal layers with a sharp knife. Spoon 2 to 3 cups of heated rhubarb sauce over the bottom layer. Add the top layer, with the brown side down. Spoon additional sauce on top. Serve warm.

SERVES 6 TO 8

Simple Sauce

Prepare this sauce for Rhubarb Shortcake or to have on hand for pancakes, waffles, ice cream, or pound cake.

4 cups chopped (1-inch pieces) fresh rhubarb

¾ cup sugar

Combine the rhubarb and sugar in a medium-sized saucepan. Add enough water to cover the bottom of the pan. Simmer until the rhubarb is soft, about 20 minutes. (The sauce may be stored, refrigerated, for up to 1 week.)

MAKES 4 CUPS

Rhubarb-Strawberry Bavarian

Elegant when served in stemmed glasses, this dessert may also be prepared in a mold.

3 cups chopped rhubarb

1 cup orange juice

1 package (about 3 ounces) strawberry-flavored gelatin

½ cup whipping cream

3 tablespoons sugar

6 to 8 strips orange peel (optional)

1. Cook the rhubarb and orange juice in a saucepan over medium heat for 8 to 10 minutes, or until crisp-tender.

2. Remove from heat; add gelatin, stirring until it dissolves. Set aside to cool.

3. Beat the whipping cream until foamy. Gradually add the sugar and beat until peaks form.

4. Fold the whipped cream into the gelatin mixture and spoon into dessert dishes. Chill until firm, at least 4 hours or up to 12 hours. Garnish with orange peel, if desired.

SERVES 6 TO 8

Easy Rhubarb Ginger Dessert

This preparation allows the flavors of rhubarb and ginger to shine through. It's easy because you simply microwave it and chill.

5 cups chopped (1-inch pieces) fresh rhubarb

1 cup sugar

2 tablespoons chopped crystallized ginger

Whipped cream

1. In a microwave-safe baking dish, microwave the rhubarb for 5 to 6 minutes or until tender when pierced with a paring knife. Stir several times during the cooking, but do not break the fruit.

2. Stir in the sugar and ginger. Cover and cook 1 minute longer, or until the sugar is dissolved.

3. Spoon into serving dishes and refrigerate at least 4 hours.

4. Serve with whipped cream.

SERVES 6

Rhubarb Spring Celebration

Alternating layers of gingersnaps and rhubarb provide a satisfying dessert that celebrates one of the first crops of spring.

7 cups chopped (1-inch pieces) fresh rhubarb

1 cup water

1 cup gingersnap crumbs (about 15 cookies)

⅔ cup sugar

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1 pint vanilla ice cream or whipped cream

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 1-quart baking dish.

2. In a saucepan, combine the rhubarb and water. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Drain well.

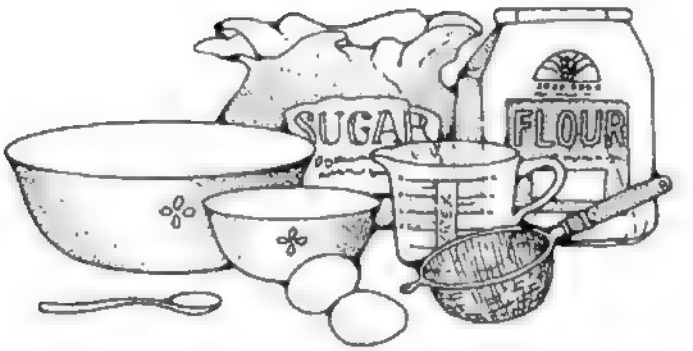
3. Blend the gingersnaps, sugar, cinnamon, and melted butter in a small bowl.

4. Spread half the rhubarb mixture in a layer in the bottom of the prepared dish, then sprinkle half the cookie mixture over the rhubarb. Repeat the layering.

5. Bake for 15 minutes, or until bubbly.

6. Serve warm with ice cream or whipped cream.

SERVES 8



Rhubarb Cobbler

The thick biscuit crust on a cobbler hides luscious sweetened fruit, or our favorite vegetable in this case. Cobblers are always homey favorites.

5 cups chopped rhubarb

1¾ cups sugar

½ cup (1 stick) butter, cut into bits

⅛ teaspoon plus a pinch of salt

1 cup flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

½ cup milk

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1 cup water

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 9- by 13-inch baking pan. Spread the rhubarb on the bottom of the pan.

2. In a medium-sized mixing bowl, combine ¾ cup of the sugar, the butter, and ⅛ teaspoon of the salt. Add the flour, baking powder, and milk; stir until just combined. Spoon over the rhubarb.

3. In a small bowl, combine the remaining 1 cup sugar, the cornstarch, and the pinch of salt, and sprinkle over the rhubarb mixture. Pour water evenly over all. Bake for 60 minutes or until topping is golden and filling is bubbling thickly.

SERVES 8 TO 10

Rhubarb and Apple Crumble

A crumble is a British dessert akin to an American crisp. It derives its name from the crumbly texture of the topping.

1 pound rhubarb stalks, cut into 1-inch pieces

2 cooking apples (Braeburn and Mutsu Crispin are good choices), peeled, cored, and chopped

⅓ cup sugar

1 tablespoon grated lemon zest

1 tablespoon lemon juice

½ cup orange juice

2 tablespoons water

⅓ cup raisins

¾ cup dried coconut

½ cup flour

⅓ cup brown sugar

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

4 tablespoons butter, cubed

⅓ cup slivered almonds

Ice cream or whipped topping

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.

2. In a saucepan, combine the rhubarb, apples, sugar, lemon zest, lemon juice, orange juice, and water. Bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes.

3. Add the raisins. Mix well and pour into a 2-quart baking dish.

4. Mix the coconut, flour, brown sugar, and cinnamon in a mediumsized bowl. Blend in the butter until the mixture is crumbly. Sprinkle the mixture over the rhubarb, then top with the slivered almonds.

5. Bake for 15 minutes, or until topping is golden brown.

6. Serve with ice cream or whipped topping.

SERVES 4 TO 5

Rhubarb-Raspberry Compote

You can enjoy this dish in the dead of winter, because it's made with frozen berries and rhubarb, purchased or home-frozen. It's a great dessert for last-minute guests since you can keep all the ingredients on hand.

1 package (10 ounces) frozen unsweetened rhubarb

½ cup sugar

1 package (10 ounces) frozen raspberries

¼ cup Grand Marnier or Chambord

1. Heat the rhubarb with the sugar in a medium-sized saucepan over medium heat for 4 to 5 minutes, until the rhubarb is thawed. Stir in the raspberries and continue heating the mixture just until the berries are thawed, about 3 minutes.

2. Remove from heat, gently stir in the Grand Marnier, and serve the compote warm.

SERVES 6

Rhubarb Bread Pudding

This is the recipe we go for when the first stalks of rhubarb are ready because it requires less rhubarb than most recipes. It works for breakfast as well as for dessert.

2 cups cubed white bread

1 cup diced rhubarb

⅓ cup brown sugar

⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1 tablespoon butter, cut into bits

1 egg

¼ cup granulated sugar

1 cup milk

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Cream (optional)

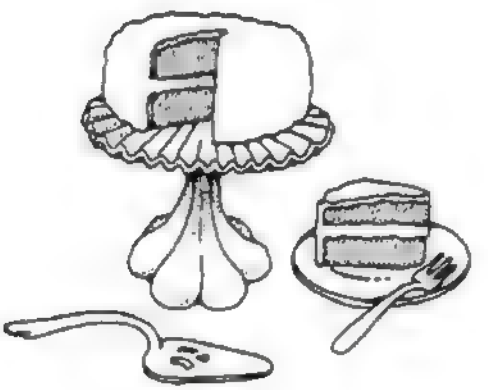
1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease an 8-inch square baking dish.

2. Spread half of the bread cubes evenly in the baking dish. Add the rhubarb and sprinkle with the brown sugar and nutmeg. Top with the remaining bread cubes and dot with butter.

3. Beat the egg, then stir in the granulated sugar, milk, and vanilla. Pour the mixture over the contents of the baking dish.

4. Bake for about 40 minutes, or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Serve warm or cold with cream, if desired. Refrigerate if not served within 2 hours.

SERVES 6



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Pies

Rhubarb Pie, Strawberry-Rhubarb Pie. They're probably the most well-known recipe names featuring rhubarb. Here, we treat you to the spice of life: a variety of rhubarb pies.

Rosy Red Pie

The redder the rhubarb variety you use, the rosier the pie. Orange or lime zest may be substituted for the lemon.

Pastry for two 9-inch piecrusts, unbaked
1 tablespoon tapioca
1½ pounds rhubarb, cut into 1-inch lengths
¾ cup plus 2 teaspoons sugar
½ cup flour
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
2 tablespoons butter, cut into bits
1 egg white, beaten

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Fit one pastry into a 9-inch pie pan. Sprinkle the tapioca over it.

2. Combine the rhubarb, ¾ cup of the sugar, the flour, the salt, and the lemon zest. Mix well. Spoon the mixture into the piecrust. Dot pie with the butter.

3. Drape the remaining pastry over the filling. Seal top and bottom crust edges together; trim to ½-inch overhang. Fold the overhang under; crimp edge decoratively. Brush the pie with the egg white and sprinkle with the remaining 2 teaspoons sugar.

4. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce oven to 375°F and bake 20 minutes longer, or until crust is browned.

SERVES 8

Rhubarb Custard Pie

The crumbly oat topping on this pie makes for a refreshing change from double-crust pies.

Pastry for one 9-inch piecrust, unbaked
3½ cups chopped (¼-inch pieces) fresh rhubarb
1½ cups sugar
3 eggs, beaten
¼ cup cream or half-and-half
⅛ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon flour

Topping

1½ cups quick-cooking oats
1 cup brown sugar
½ teaspoon nutmeg
4 tablespoons butter, melted

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Fit the pastry into a 9-inch pie pan and make a decorative edge by crimping with your fingers or pressing with a fork.

2. Combine the rhubarb, sugar, eggs, cream, and salt. Sprinkle the flour over the bottom of the piecrust. Pour the filling into the shell.

3. For the topping, mix the oats, brown sugar, nutmeg, and butter. Spread the mixture evenly over the surface of the rhubarb filling.

4. Bake the pie for 10 minutes, then reduce the oven to 350°F and continue to bake for 50 minutes longer, or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean.

SERVES 8

Rhubarb-Strawberry Pie

Brown sugar is the key to the great flavor in our version of this classic pie.

Pastry for two 9-inch piecrusts, unbaked
2 cups chopped (¼-inch pieces) rhubarb
2 cups sliced fresh strawberries
¾ cup brown sugar
½ cup granulated sugar
2 tablespoons flour
1 teaspoon lemon zest, grated

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Fit one pastry into a 9-inch pie pan.

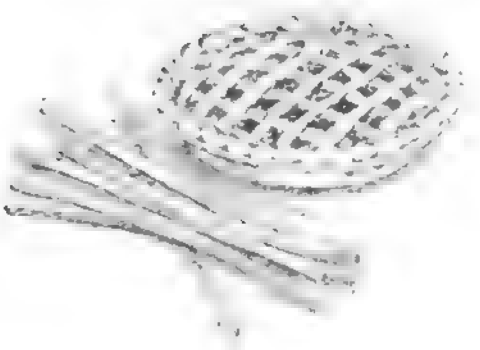
2. In a large bowl, gently mix the rhubarb and strawberries.

3. Combine the brown sugar, granulated sugar, flour, and lemon zest in a small bowl and sprinkle it over the rhubarb and berries. Toss lightly.

4. Spoon the mixture into the pastry in the pie pan. Drape the remaining pastry over the filling. Seal top and bottom crust edges together; trim to ½-inch overhang. Fold the overhang under; crimp edge decoratively.

5. Bake for 50 minutes, or until crust is golden brown.

SERVES 8



Rhubarb Flan

A pastry tart traditionally baked in a flan ring, a bottomless metal ring with straight sides that's set on a baking sheet before baking the dough, this custardy dessert can also be made in a pie pan.

Pastry for one 9-inch piecrust, unbaked

3 cups chopped (½-inch pieces) rhubarb

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar

2 eggs 2 tablespoons flour

1 cup cream or half-and-half

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and adjust oven rack to lowest position.

2. Set a flan ring on a baking sheet and fit the piecrust into it, or fit the crust into a well-greased pie pan or fluted tart pan.

3. In a medium bowl, toss the rhubarb with 2 tablespoons of the sugar and sprinkle onto pastry.

4. In the same bowl, lightly beat the eggs. Stir in the flour and the remaining ½ cup sugar, then the cream. Pour over rhubarb.

5. Bake on the lowest rack in the oven for 40 minutes or until a knife inserted near the center of the custard comes out clean.

6. Cool on a wire rack. Refrigerate if not served within 2 hours.

SERVES 8

Pieplant 'n Peach Pie

Coconut and peach are surprising accents to rhubarb in this pie, titled after the name rhubarb still goes by in some parts of the United States: pieplant.

Pastry for two 9-inch piecrusts, unbaked

1 can (8½ ounces) sliced peaches

2 cups sliced (¼-inch thick) rhubarb

1¼ cups sugar

¼ cup flaked coconut

3 tablespoons tapioca

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

3 tablespoons butter, cut into bits

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Fit one pastry into a 9-inch pie pan.

2. Drain the peaches, reserving the liquid. Chop the peaches and combine with the rhubarb, sugar, coconut, and tapioca. Add the peach juice and vanilla.

3. Pour the mixture into the piecrust. Dot with butter.

4. Drape the remaining pastry over the filling. Seal top and bottom crust edges together; trim to ½-inch overhang. Fold the overhang under; crimp edge decoratively. With a sharp knife, make several small slits for steam to escape.

5. Bake for 45 to 50 minutes, or until the top is golden.

SERVES 6 TO 8

Rhubarb Mincemeat

If you'd enjoy a Rhubarb Mincemeat pie at Thanksgiving, make a double batch of mincemeat — use one half for an in-season pie and freeze the rest until it's time to bake your holiday pie.

2½ cups brown sugar
2 cups chopped rhubarb
2 cups chopped apples
1 cup raisins
½ cup currants
¼ cup chopped citron
½ cup water
Grated zest and pulp of 1 orange
Juice of ½ lemon
½ teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg

1. Combine all of the ingredients in a large saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil, reduce heat, and cook about 30 minutes, or until the mincemeat is thick and clear.

2. Refrigerate, covered, or freeze for longer-term storage.

MAKES FILLING FOR 1 MINCEMEAT PIE

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Puddings & Such

Used like fruit, rhubarb is tasty in hot and cold puddings, ice cream, and sorbet, as you'll find when you prepare the following recipes.

Rhubarb Cream Pudding

This creamy pudding is stiffened by gelatin; its lemon flavor is lovely.

4 cups chopped (1-inch pieces) rhubarb

1½ cups water

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

2 envelopes unflavored gelatin

½ cup cool water

½ cup heavy cream

1. Combine the rhubarb, 1 cup of the water, the sugar, and the lemon zest in a medium-sized saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until tender.

2. Sprinkle the gelatin over the cool water in a 1-cup measure. Let stand 5 minutes to soften, then stir it into the rhubarb mixture.

3. Cook for 5 minutes longer, mashing the rhubarb in the pan. Pour the mixture into a large bowl and refrigerate until it holds its shape softly when spooned, about 1½ hours.

4. In a small bowl, beat the cream with an electric mixer until stiff. Fold it into the rhubarb until no white streaks can be seen.

5. Spoon the mixture into a 5-cup dish or individual sherbet dishes. Chill 4 hours or until firm.

SERVES 6

Hot Rhubarb Pudding

Hot puddings are classic comfort food in many homes, including ours.

4 eggs, beaten
2 cups sugar
½ cup unbleached all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
8 cups chopped rhubarb
Whipped cream

1. Preheat oven to 350°F and grease a 3-quart baking dish.

2. Whisk together the eggs, sugar, flour, and vanilla. Stir in the rhubarb. Pour the mixture into the prepared dish.

3. Bake for 40 minutes, or until the pudding is firm.

4. Serve warm with whipped cream.

SERVES 8

Rhubarb Ice Cream

A "still-frozen" version of ice cream, this mixture can be made in an ice cream maker; follow the manufacturer's directions.

2 cups chopped rhubarb
1 cup sugar
1 cup water
1½ cups miniature marshmallows
2 teaspoons lemon juice
Red food coloring (optional)
1 cup heavy cream, whipped, or thawed whipped dessert topping

1. Combine the rhubarb, sugar, and water in a saucepan. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the marshmallows; heat until they melt.

2. Stir in the lemon juice and a few drops of the food coloring, if desired. Refrigerate the mixture for 3 hours.

3. Fold in the whipped cream. Pour the mixture into a shallow tray or cake pan. Cover and freeze at the coldest setting of the freezer compartment of the refrigerator or in a deep freezer for 30 minutes to 1 hour, until the mixture is mushy.

4. Scrape the mixture into a chilled bowl and beat with an electric mixer as rapidly as possible, until the mixture is smooth. Return the mixture to the freezer.

5. When almost frozen solid, beat again.

6. Return the mixture to the tray and cover with plastic wrap to prevent ice-crystal formation. Freeze until solid.

7. Serve immediately or pack into airtight containers for storing in the freezer.

SERVES 2 TO 4

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Jams, Preserves & Conserves

When the rhubarb is ready to harvest faster than you can eat it, it's time to take out the boiling-water bath canner and make jam, conserves, and chutney, all treats you can enjoy months after the rhubarb harvest is done.

Ruby Jam

Strawberries and rhubarb pair in this delicious spread for muffins, tea breads, or toast.

4 cups chopped (1-inch pieces) fresh rhubarb

6 cups sugar

4 cups fresh strawberries, hulled, or two 10-ounce packages frozen strawberries

1 cup blanched slivered almonds

1. Combine the rhubarb and 3 cups of the sugar in a large bowl and let stand for several hours.

2. Crush the berries, pour into a kettle, and cover with the remaining 3 cups sugar. Add the rhubarb and cook over low heat, stirring, until the sugar is dissolved. Increase the heat and cook rapidly, stirring, for 15 minutes.

3. Stir in the nuts and mix well. Continue cooking until the jam is ready (see box, page 29). Pour into hot half-pint jars, leaving ½ inch of headspace. Wipe rims and seal with new lids and rings.

4. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath canner (see page 29) up to 1,000 feet altitude (process for 15 minutes at 1,001 to 3,000 feet or 20 minutes above 3,000 feet).

5. Remove jars from the water bath; let cool at room temperature.

6. Check seals, label, and store in a cool, dry place.

MAKES 8 HALF-PINTS

Basics of Boiling-Water Bath Canning

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends the following procedure for boiling-water bath canning for jams, jellies, and conserves.

1. Fill the canner halfway with water. Preheat water to 180°F.
2. Load filled jars, fitted with lids, into the canner rack and use the handles to lower the rack into the water; or fill the canner, one jar at a time, using a jar lifter.
3. Add more boiling water, if needed, so the water level is at least 1 inch above jar tops. Turn heat to the highest position until water boils vigorously.
4. Set a timer for the recommended processing time.
5. Cover with the canner lid and reduce the heat setting to maintain a gentle boil throughout the processing time. Add more boiling water, if needed, to keep the water level above the jars.
6. When jars have been boiled for the recommended time, turn off the heat and remove the canner lid.
7. Using a jar lifter, remove the jars and place them on a towel, leaving at least 1-inch spaces between the jars during cooling.

For detailed information about canning procedures, contact Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250-0900; 202-720-7441; www.csrees.usda.com. Readers may also contact the extension service in their county.

In Canada, contact Public Information Request Service, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Sir John Carling Building, 930 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0C5; 613-759-1000; www.agr.gc.ca.

Jelly Tests

Jelly is ready to be canned when it reaches 220°F on a jelly or candy thermometer. If you don't have one, use the old-fashioned sheeting method. Put 1 tablespoon of the hot fruit mixture on a cold plate or spoon, then turn the plate or spoon on its side over the sink. If the mixture "sheets off" (falls off) in one large drop, the jelly is done.

Jams are ready when a spoonful of fruit dropped in a cold bowl holds its shape. For preserves and conserves, a spoonful of the mixture should hold its shape or mound up on a cold spoon or plate.

Rhubarb and Ginger Jam

The ginger flavor in this jam comes from preserved ginger, which has been preserved in a sugar-salt mixture and is different from crystallized ginger. Preserved ginger can be found in Asian markets and some supermarkets.

3 pounds rhubarb, cut into 1-inch pieces

7 cups sugar

½ cup chopped preserved ginger

6 tablespoons lemon juice

1. Combine the rhubarb and sugar in a large saucepan and let stand for 3 hours.

2. Stir in the ginger and lemon juice and bring to a boil. Immediately lower the heat and simmer about 1 hour, stirring periodically, until the jam is ready (see box, page 29). Skim off the foam.

3. Ladle hot jam into hot jars, filling to within ¼ inch of tops. Wipe rims and seal with new lids and rings.

4. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath canner (see page 29) up to 1,000 feet altitude (process for 15 minutes at 1,001 to 3,000 feet or 20 minutes above 3,000 feet).

5. Remove jars from the water bath; let cool at room temperature.

6. Check seals, label, and store in a cool, dry place.

MAKES 4 PINTS

Rosy Rhubarb and Pineapple Jam

Serve this jam on English muffins or on ham or turkey sandwiches, with spicy mustard to balance the sweetness.

2 cups diced rhubarb
1 can (20 ounces) crushed pineapple
1 teaspoon grated orange zest
½ teaspoon grated lemon zest
2 tablespoons lemon juice
6 cups sugar
1 pouch liquid pectin
Red food coloring (optional)

1. Combine the rhubarb, pineapple, orange and lemon zests, and lemon juice in a large saucepan. Add the sugar; mix well.

2. Stirring constantly, bring the mixture to a rolling boil; continue stirring and cooking for 1 minute.

3. Remove from the heat and stir in the pectin, then several drops of food coloring, if desired. Skim off foam.

4. Ladle the jam into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace. Wipe rims and seal with new lids and rings.

5. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath canner (see page 29) up to 1,000 feet altitude (process for 15 minutes at 1,001 to 3,000 feet or 20 minutes above 3,000 feet).

6. Remove jars from the water bath; let cool at room temperature.

7. Check seals, label, and store in a cool, dry place.

MAKES 3 PINTS

Ruby Conserve

The pineapple and lime flavors make this a good accompaniment to Asian-inspired dishes.

4 cups chopped rhubarb

1 can (8 ounces) crushed pineapple

Juice of 3 oranges

Juice of 1 lime

2 cups golden seedless raisins

Sugar

1. In a large bowl, combine the rhubarb, pineapple, and orange and lime juices. Stir in the raisins. Measure the mixture and put it in a large saucepan; add 1 cup of sugar for each cup of rhubarb mixture.

2. Cook slowly, stirring occasionally, for 45 minutes, or until the mixture is ready for canning (see page 29).

3. Ladle into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace. Wipe rims and seal with new lids and rings. Process for 15 minutes in a boiling-water bath canner (see page 29) up to 1,000 feet altitude (process for 20 minutes at 1,001 to 3,000 feet or 25 minutes above 3,000 feet).

4. Let cool to room temperature. Check seals, label, and store in a cool, dry place.

MAKES 10 HALF-PINTS

Rhubarb Chutney

A tasty accompaniment to grilled meat or fish, this chutney also works well on hamburgers.

3½ pounds rhubarb, cut into 1-inch pieces

3 cups sugar

1 package (15 ounces) raisins

2 large navel oranges, peeled, sectioned, and cut into pieces

1 cup cider vinegar

1 two-inch stick cinnamon

6 whole cloves

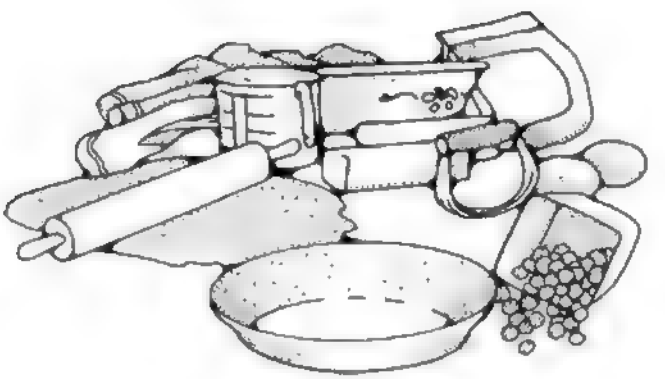
1. Combine rhubarb, sugar, raisins, oranges, and vinegar in a large saucepan. Tie the cinnamon and cloves in a piece of cheesecloth or put them in a spice bag and push down into the rhubarb mixture.

2. Cook over low heat, stirring frequently, until thickened and ready for canning (see box, page 29). Remove from the heat; discard the spices.

3. Ladle hot chutney into hot jars, filling to within ¼ inch of tops. Wipe rims and seal with new lids and rings. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling-water bath canner (see page 29) up to 1,000 feet altitude (process for 15 minutes at 1,001 to 3,000 feet or 20 minutes above 3,000 feet).

4. Let cool to room temperature. Check seals, label, and store in a cool, dry place.

MAKES 4 PINTS



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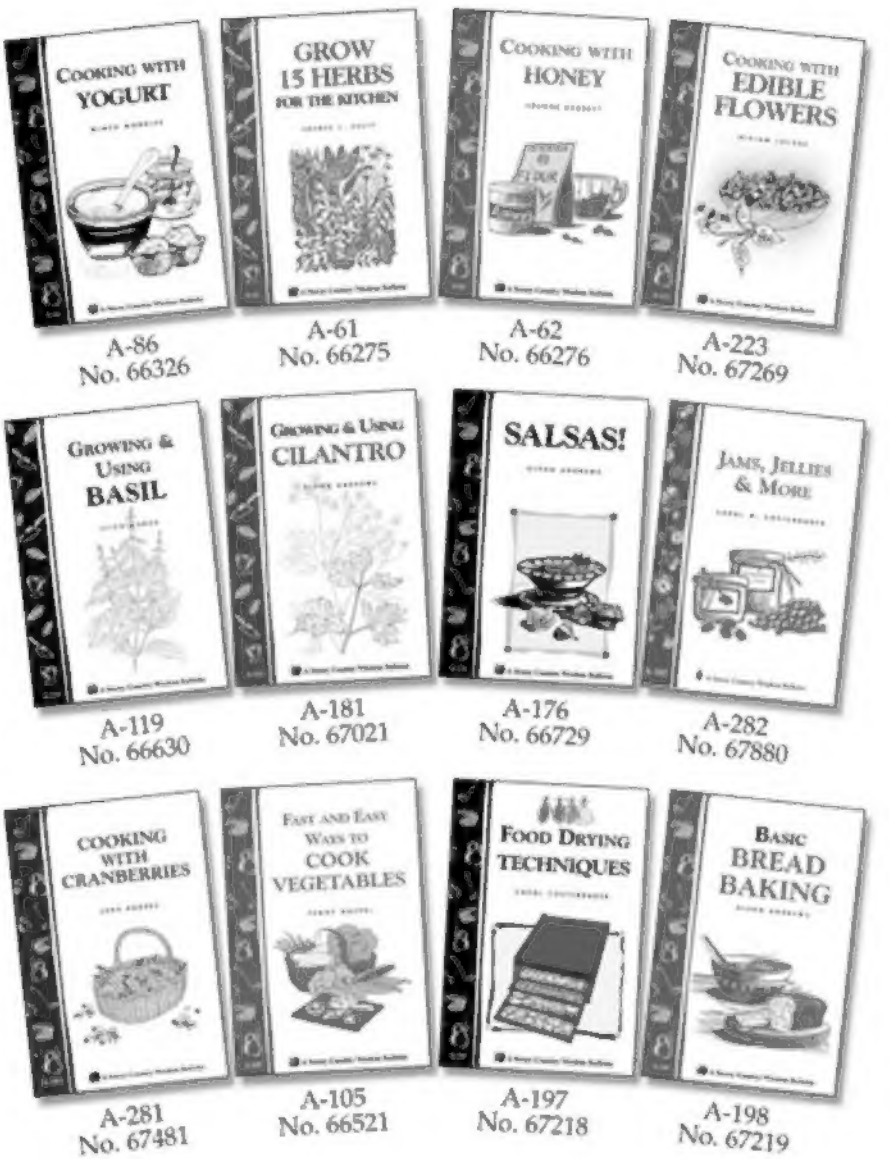

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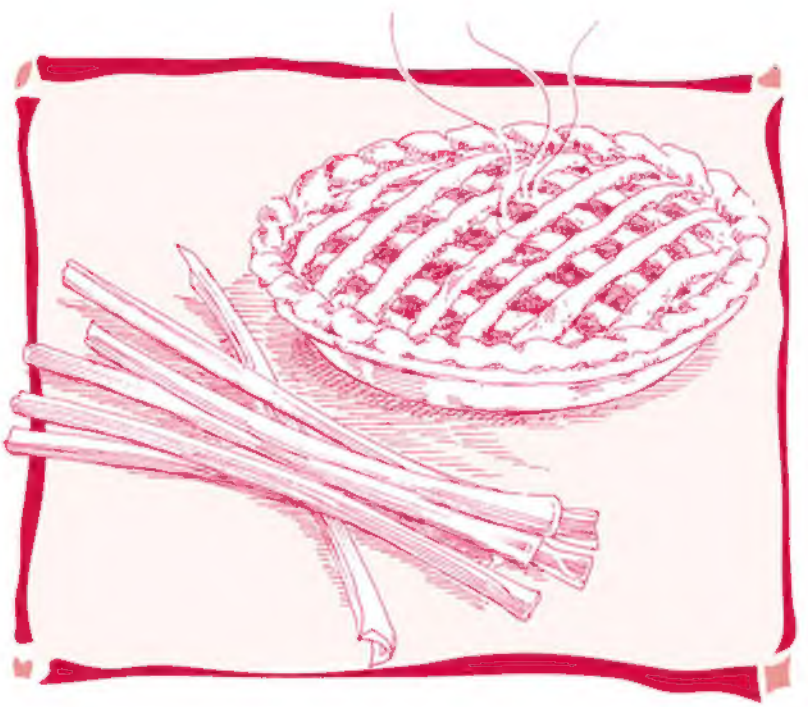

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